A

SERMON

PREACHED

Before the

QUEEN

AT

WHITEHALL,

On the 11th of *April*, 1690.

By *JOHN SHARP*, D.D. Dean of *Canterbury*, and one of Their Majesties Chaplains.

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GAL. V. xiii.

Use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.

ANY one that useth to make reflections upon his own actions, cannot but observe, That one of the great occasions of the sins he is guilty of in the course of his Life, is the too free use of his lawful *Liberty*.

I do not say, that any Man doth commit sin by using his *lawful liberty* (for that would be a kind of contradiction): But I say, the using our *liberty* to the utmost pitch and extent of

that which we call *lawful*, is the occaſion of a great many ſins that would otherwiſe not have been committed.

If one ſhould offer to tempt a Man that hath any ſenſe of Vertue or Religion, to do a thing, that at the firſt ſight appears ſinful or wicked; it would certainly be rejected. Every one that has any regard to God or goodneſs, would ſtart at ſuch a propoſal. But here is our infelicity. A Temptation comes on by degrees. And at the firſt we are ingaged in nothing but what is lawful and honeſt; and accordingly we uſe that *liberty* which *nature* and *religion* allows us; and ſo we proceed on inſenſibly in the uſe of that *liberty*, till at laſt we become uncertain, whether we have not exceeded the bounds of what is *lawful*: And by this means we are often caught. Nay indeed nothing but this could betray well meaning perſons, and ſuch as are vertuouſly diſpoſed, into ſin. *Licitis perimus omnes*, ſaid a devout Man: It is by *lawful things* that we commonly miſcarry.

With great reaſon therefore doth St. *Paul* give this advice in the Text: *Brethren* (ſaith he) *ye have been called unto liberty, only uſe not liberty for an occaſion to the fleſh.*

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There is no doubt but the Apoſtle writ theſe words upon occaſion of, and with reference to, the great Controverſy that was then on foot among Chriſtians, touching the Obligation of the Jewiſh Law.

Some then thought themſelves bound in Conſcience to obſerve all the Precepts of *Moſes* his Law. Other Chriſtians thought they were freed by the coming of Chriſt from all *legal* Obſervances. The Apoſtle determines the Caſe in favour of theſe latter, and declares, that by the Goſpel *they were called unto liberty*, and were free from all the Moſaical Impoſitions. But yet nevertheleſs he tells them they ought to be careful in the exerciſe of that *liberty*; that they *do not uſe it for an occaſion to the fleſh*.

That is to ſay, that this *liberty* to which they were *called*, ſhould not miniſter to any ſin. That they ſhould not ſo uſe it, as to be a ſnare, either to *themſelves* or *others*. To *themſelves*, by running into licentiouſneſs, and taking *unlawful liberties*. To *others*, either by affrighting the unbelieving Jews from the embracing Chriſtianity, or diſcouraging thoſe that already believed the Goſpel in the profeſſion of it.

This is the ſtrict ſenſe of the Apoſtles words,

as they come in here in the Text, and as they do relate to that occasion upon which he writ them. But, that sense, with reference to that occasion, is now out of doors among us. Though the general advice that is here given, will eternally be good and useful; nay, and always needful to be insisted on in all Ages of the World.

We have none now *that use their liberty for an occasion to the flesh*, as to the point of the *Judaical Ceremonies*: But we have abundance that do use it so as to other matters. Nay, as I said before, this too free use of our *liberty* in *lawful things*, is one of the great Sources and Fountains from whence most of our irregularities do proceed. And therefore I do not know how I can entertain you more usefully upon this Text, than by endeavouring to give you the best Rules I can, for the reducing the Apostle's Exhortation into practice, as it doth concern us at this day.

But that you may see plainly what I drive at, I will yet state the matter a little more particularly.

Our Case in this World is this. The Laws of *Vertue* and *Religion*, do allow Men all *reasonable liberties* in the gratification of their natural

ral Paſſions and Appetites, and in the uſe and enjoyment of all the good things of this Life. But all *unreaſonable* gratifications, all *exceſſes* and *immoderate liberties*, are forbidden by *Religion*, and therefore are *ſinful* and *criminal*.

If now in all Caſes a Man could readily and certainly fix the preciſe *bounds* and *landmarks* of what is *reaſonable* and *moderate*, and what is *unreaſonable* and *exceſſive* in the uſe of his *liberty*, ſo as that upon all occaſions, and in all emergencies, he could ſay within his own mind, *Thus far I may lawfully and innocently go in the gratification of ſuch an appetite, or in the enjoyment of ſuch a pleaſure*, or the like; *but if I proceed a ſtep further, I become a Tranſgreſſor*: I ſay, if this was the caſe of a Man in the *uſe* of his *liberty*, it would be no hard matter for any well-diſpoſed perſon, to take all that *liberty* that was *moderate* and *lawful*, and to forbear all that which is *exceſſive* and *unlawful*.

But now this is not always an eaſy matter to be done. For many Caſes happen in which a Man cannot preciſely determine where it is that his *lawful liberty* ends, and where it is that it begins to be *extravagant* and *exceſſive*. So that while a Man is only deſigning to gratify his deſires in lawful inſtances, he is often car-

ried beyond his bounds, and proceeds to *exceſs*.

This now, I ſay, is one great occaſion of ſin to Mankind; and yet there is no avoiding of it, becauſe it is ſuch a one as doth neceſſarily ariſe from the nature of things.

Thus for inſtance: It is certainly very lawful for a Man to drink Wine and ſtrong drink, not only for his Healths ſake, when his Conſtitution doth require it; but alſo for Chearfulneſs, and the enjoyment of his Friends. But on the other ſide, *Drunkenneſs* and *Intemperance*, are grievous Crimes, and utterly forbid by our Religion. Whilſt now a Man on one hand hath a deſire to take that liberty that is allowed him, and to gratify his natural inclination to *mirth* and *pleaſantneſs*, or to ſhew *Civility*, as he terms it, to his Company; And on the other hand, he has no certain unalterable meaſures to proceed by, for the ſtinting himſelf in this Caſe; (as ſurely it is a very hard matter to preſcribe or define, either to a Man's ſelf or others, the exact pitch or limits where *Temperance* ends, and *Intemperance* begins): by this means, I ſay, he is often betrayed into ſin. Thinking with himſelf, that there is a great *latitude* and *compaſs* in the exerciſe of *Temperance* and

and *Sobriety* (as indeed there is,) and that therefore he may go on ſome time longer with the Company; the Wine by this means ſteals upon him, and he is, before he was aware, fallen into the ſin of *Intemperance* and *Exceſs*.

And thus it is, not only as to the *uſe* of our liberty in things allowed, but as to the performance of our *duty* in things *commanded*.

Every Man is ſenſible, that it is a principal Law of our Religion to be *Charitable*, and to give Alms out of our ſubſtance. But now it is not ſo eaſy a matter for any Man to define, and ſet out the *quantum*, or the preciſe proportion of Alms, which every one is bound to give; ſo as to be able to pronounce, that if a Man give ſo much, he performs his duty, and is a *Charitable* Man, for one in his Circumſtances; but if he gives leſs than that, he is *Covetous* and *Uncharitable*. Now, I ſay, becauſe this duty of *Charity* is thus indefinitely left, and there is ſuch an *affinity* and *undiſtinguiſhableneſs* between the leaſt meaſures of *Charity*, and the ſin of being *uncharitable*; Men do from hence often take occaſion to fall ſhort in the performance of it. And as in the former inſtance I gave about *drinking*, they are apt to take more

liberty than is *allowed* them; so in this they are apt to do less than is *commanded* them. For if they do but give something to the poor out of their yearly Income, they think they give enough to satisfy the Command of *Charity*; and so they make no Conscience of *saving* and *hoarding* without end or without measure.

There are a hundred more instances besides these two that I have named, wherein there is such a *latitude* left to our practices, and the difference between *lawful* and *unlawful*: *duty* and *sin* lies in so small a compass, that it is hard to separate and distinguish them, unless a Man be both very wise and very honest.

We have not any Law of God which defines how often we are to *pray*; Or when it is our duty to *fast*; Or to what degree we may be *angry*; Or how we are to govern our selves as to the quantity or kinds of our *meat* and *drink*; Or how far we may comply with the *Customs* of the World; Or how splendid we may be in our *apparel* and *equippage*; Or what *games* and *recreations* may be used, and how often; Or what Rules we are to go by in *buying* and *selling*, and our other dealings with Men; Or how far we may seek our own, when our right cannot be obtained without prejudice to our Neighbour. In

In these, I say, and abundance of other Cases, we have no expres particular Laws of God to steer and measure our actions by; nor indeed is it possible we should have: Because what is fit and reasonable to be done in these Cases, admits of so great a difference from the infinite variety of the circumstances of particular Men.

What now must we do in these Cases? How must we order our selves, that we may perform our duty, and keep out of sin?

Why in answer to this I say, We have only general rules to direct us in these matters; and those rules we are to apply to our own particular cases.

In this *latitude* that things are left in, we are to use our *liberty* as carefully and as prudently as is possible; taking our measures from the principles of *reason*, and the general rules of the *Gospel*. Now what those general rules and measures are, it is my business at this time to treat of.

And *three* things I have here to propose for the *use* of our *liberty*, which will, I think, be a sufficient direction to us in all cases of this nature; and which if we do carefully observe, we shall never *use our liberty for an occasion to the Flesh*;

Fleſh; but we ſhall both come up to what is our duty, and ſhall likewiſe avoid all thoſe ſins which Mankind are ſo frequently betrayed into, through the too great affinity that there is between *Vertue* and *Vice*, and the indiſcreet exerciſe of their *liberty* upon occaſion thereof.

And the *firſt* thing I would poſſeſs you all with, and which indeed, as it is the moſt general, ſo it is the beſt advice that can be given in this matter, is this: *That we would endeavour to be heartily honeſt and ſerious in the buſineſs of Religion*: That we would ſincerely devote our ſelves to the ſervice of God: That we would puriſy our minds as much as may be from all ſenſual and ſelfiſh Principles; and in all our actions and purſuits, have more reſpect to the doing our duty, and the approving our ſelves to our great Lord and Maſter, than to any other conſideration.

This is that which St. *Paul* ſo often exhorts us to. *Whether* (ſaith he) *you eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* And again, *Whatever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, knowing that of the Lord you ſhall receive the reward of the inheritance.*

If we could once get our ſelves poſſeſſed of this *Probity*, this *Purity* of mind and heart, it would

would better inſtruct us in the *uſe* of our *liberty*, and teach us to diſtinguiſh between *good* and *evil*; what is fit to be done, and what ought not to be done, in all caſes and emergencies we are concerned in; than all the dry Rules of *Caſuiſtical* learning, be they never ſo carefully and accurately laid down.

When a Man is once arrived to that holy temper of mind, that he heartily loves God and his Neighbour, and has ſuch a lively ſenſe of the truth and the excellency of Chriſt's Religion; that he is reſolved, that that ſhall influence and govern the whole courſe of his Life, and that he will do all his actions, as much as he can, for the honour of our Lord, and the advancement of his ſervice in the World: There can hardly any particular caſe occur to ſuch a Man in which he will not have rules and meaſures ready at hand to ſteer and direct him in his proceedings.

Nay this general Principle alone *of doing all his actions to the glory of God*, that is to ſay, to the honour of his Religion, and the edification of his Neighbour: I ſay this alone will afford him ſufficient light and direction for the government of his actions in all Contingencies. Becauſe there is no action he can be ingaged

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in, but it is at the first sight discernable, whether the doing of it, or the not doing of it, doth more tend to the honour of his Religion, or the good of others.

That which makes the conduct of a Man's self in this World, so nice and difficult a matter, and has given occasion to the discussion of so many cases of Conscience about the *lawfulness* or *unlawfulness* of Actions, is this; That Men are not throughly *honest*, but halt between God and the World. They have a great mind to *serve* their *pleasures* and their *ambition*, and their secular ends; and yet to *serve God* too, and this puts them upon *tampering* and trying to reconcile these interests together.

Whence it comes to pass, that the usual questions that arise about their actions, are not, what is best to be done, or what is most agreeable to their duty in this or the other case? But, how far they may go in the gratification of such an appetite or passion, without transgressing the Laws of God? How far they may satisfy their *covetous* desires, without being *unjust*? Whether they may use such *arts* or *tricks*, in getting or saving, without being *knavish*? How far they may *drink*, and not be *drunk*? How far they may gratify their humour

mout of *decking* and *adorning* themſelves, and yet do no unlawful thing? How far they may indulge *wantonneſs*, and yet be *chaſt*?

Now, as I ſaid before, ſuch Queſtions as theſe are not eaſy to be reſolved (nor indeed is the Goſpel of Chriſt ſo contrived, as if it had taken much care whether they were reſolved or no.) But they are really Caſes and Problems that require both Judgment and Learning, and likewiſe the conſideration of abundance of particular circumſtances, to have a good account given of them.

But now the Man that doth intirely give up himſelf to the conduct of the Spirit, and propoſeth nothing to himſelf in all his actions but the pure Glory of God: Such a Man having none of theſe Worldly ſenſual deſigns to ſerve in his actions, can rarely be ſuppoſed to have any of theſe queſtions to put to himſelf. And conſequently he can never be at a loſs or uncertainty, how he is to act for want of a reſolution of them, much leſs can he be in danger of tranſgreſſing the bounds that God hath fixed to his Actions.

All the point that ſuch a one hath to conſider in any action is, whether will his doing or not doing ſuch an action better ſerve the ends

of Religion? Which will tend most to his own spiritual benefit, and the profit of his Neighbour, to pursue this design, or to let it alone? Whether will be more conducive to the honour of his Lord, to gratify such an appetite, or to deny it satisfaction?

This I say is the only question that such a Man has to put to himself, and there is no difficulty in giving an answer to it. For there is scarce any case to be put concerning an action, but it is very obvious, without an instructer, to find out which side of the case, if it be chosen, will most minister to the ends of *Vertue*, and *Religion* and *Charity*. Or if it be not obvious, then it is very certain, the Man needs not much deliberate about it, but may chuse either side indifferently.

It is a very hard matter oftentimes to determine concerning the *necessity* and *obligation* of Actions; that is, whether a Man be *bound* to do them or no. It is likewise often a hard matter to determine concerning the *lawfulness* of Actions, whether a Man *may* do them or no. But it is a very easy matter in most cases to determine, concerning the *expedience* of Actions; that is to say, whether it be *best* and *fittest* for a Man to do them or no. Now this last,

laſt, I ſay, is the point that a throughly good Man will conſider and ſteer himſelf by in all his Actions.

Thus for inſtance, It may perhaps bear a diſpute, Whether a Man be preciſely bound by God's Law, to *pray* ſolemnly twice a day, ſo as that he ſins if he do not: But it will bear no diſpute, that it is much better, and more acceptable to God, and beneficial to our ſelves, to pray at leaſt thus often, than to pray ſeldomer. And therefore ſuch a perſon as I am ſpeaking of, will upon this conſideration put it in practice (nay and *pray* oftner too as he has occaſion) without concerning himſelf whether he be ſtrictly bound ſo to do or no.

It may bear a diſpute among ſome Perſons, whether *painting* the *Face* be not allowable to Chriſtian Women. But it can bear no diſpute among any, that it is more agreeable to the Sobriety, and Modeſty and Chaſtity, of a Diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt, and better ſerves the ends of Religion to forbear all ſuch ſuſpicious Ornaments. (There being rarely any good end to be ſerved by them, but abundance of evil often ariſing from them.) Now this conſideration alone is enough to ſet the heart of every ſerious Chriſtian againſt thoſe practices, and

to make them wholly to refrain them.

Thus again, it is argued both ways about *Play* or *Gaming*, whether it be lawful or no: (eſpecially when ſums of money are played for; and the thing becomes rather an *avaritious* Contention, than a *Recreation* and *Divertiſement*) ſome believing that it is innocent; others that it is a grievous ſin. But there is no Man, even of thoſe that uſe it moſt, but will readily acknowledge, that it expoſeth a Man to great and dangerous *Temptations* of ſundry kinds; that it is the occaſion of abundance of *ſin*, and abundance of *miſchief*; and that it ſeldom fails to produce intolerable conſequences, both as to Mens *Souls*, and *Eſtates*, and *Families*. Now to a Man that loves God, and hath a tender ſenſe of his duty, this is enough in all Conſcience to deter him for ever from the practice of *Gaming*, though it be not made to appear to him, that it is *expreſly* and *explicitly* forbid by any Law of *Jeſus Chriſt*.

So that you ſee, that in thoſe points where there are diſputes on both ſides, when the conſideration is concerning the *obligation*, or the *lawfulneſs* of an action; there is no difficulty, no diſpute at all, when the conſideration is only concerning what is *beſt* and moſt *fitting*

to

to be done; concerning what is moſt agreeable to our duty, and moſt conducive to the honour of God and Religion, as to that action. That is evident enough in all Caſes; nor is any Man at a loſs for finding it out. And that is the Principle which I ſay every ſincere lover of God, governs himſelf by, and which I would have us all to propoſe to our ſelves for the rule of our actions; in order to the ſecuring us from thoſe *ſnares* and *ſtumbling-blocks*, to which the *affinity* between *Vertue* and *Vice*, *lawful* and *unlawful*, will otherwiſe expoſe us.

Let us not ſtand upon points with God Almighty, as if ſo much was his, and ſo much was our own; as if we were to ſhare our ſelves between his Service, and our own Pleaſures and Profits, and the like; and were reſolved not to pay him any more reſpect or love, than what ſome expreſs letter of his Law doth exact at our hands. But let us ſo entirely devote our ſelves to his Service, as to do not only all thoſe things which we are ſtrictly bound to do, or elſe we are tranſgreſſors; but all thoſe things that are acceptable to him, all thoſe things that are praiſe-worthy, and tend to the perfection of our nature, and the reputation of Chriſt's Religion.

Let

Let us make it the end of our actions, not to seek our selves, but his glory; every day to grow better and better; and in every Occurrence to consider, not what may *lawfully* be done, but what is most *becoming* a *Disciple* of *Jesus Christ* to do. In a word, what ever is *best* in any action; what ever most serves the ends of *piety*; what ever tends most to the credit of our Religion, and the benefit of others, let us consider that, and act accordingly.

And thus I am sure to design and act, is most suitable to the nature and genius of our Christian Religion; nay indeed, it is the principal Law and Commandment of it.

The design of Christianity is not to adjust the precise bounds of *Vertue* and *Vice*, *lawful* and *unlawful*, which is that that a great many among us so greedily hanker after. For the best that could have come from such a design, had been only this, that Men by this means might have been fairly instructed, how they might have avoided the being *bad*; though they never became very *good*. But the design of Christianity, is to make Men as *good* as they can possibly be; as *devout*, as *humble*, as *charitable*, as *temperate*, as *contented*, as *heavenly-minded*, as their natures will allow of in this World.

And

And for the producing this effect; the exact diſtinguiſhing the *limits* of the ſeveral *Vertues*, and their oppoſite *Vices*, ſignifies very little.

The Laws of our great Maſter are not like the *Civil*, *Municipal* Laws of Kingdoms, which are therefore wonderfully nice and critical, and particular in ſetting bounds to the practices of Men, becauſe they only look at *overt actions*; ſo that if a Man do but keep his *actions* within the compaſs of the *letter* of the Law, he may be accounted a good Subject, and is no way obnoxious to the *penalties* which the Law threatens.

If our Religion had been of this ſtrain, we ſhould without doubt have had a World of particular Laws and Precepts, and directions about our actions, in all emergent Caſes, more than we now have: And we might as eaſily have known from the *Bible*, what was *forbidden unlawful anger*, what was *exceſſive drinking*, what was *pride* and *luxury* in *Apparel*, and the like; as we now know by the *Statute-Book*, what is *Burglary*, or *Murder*, or *Treaſon*. But there was no need of theſe particularities in the inſtitution of Chriſt Jeſus. His Religion was to be a Spiritual thing: And the deſign of it was not to make us *chaſt*, or *temperate*, or *humble*, or *charitable*,

charitable, in ſuch a degree; but to make us as *chaſt* and *temperate*, as *humble* and *charitable*, as *pure* and *holy* in all our Converſation, as we poſſibly can be.

This I ſay was the deſign of Chriſt's Religion. It was to be the Higheſt *Philoſophy* that was ever taught to Mankind. It was to make us the moſt excellent and perfect Creatures, as to *purity* of *mind* and *heart*, that humane nature is capable of. And therefore it hath not been ſo accurate and particular in preſcribing bounds to our *outward actions*, becauſe it was abundantly enough for the ſecuring them, to oblige us to the higheſt degree of *inward purity*.

And this it hath done above all the Laws and Religions in the World. It teacheth us to abhor every thing that is evil or impure in all the *kinds* of it, in all the *degrees* of it, and in all the *tendencies* towards it; And to lay out our ſelves in the purſuit of every thing that is *honeſt*, that is *lovely*, that is *praiſe-worthy*, and of *good report* among Men.

If this now be the deſign of our Religion, and theſe be the Laws of it, I leave it to *you* to judge of theſe two things. *Firſt*, Whether it doth not highly concern all of us that profeſs this holy Religion, to endeavour, in all our

our Converſation, to be as holy and as vertuous as we can, and to do as much good as we can; and not to content our ſelves with ſuch a degree of *honeſty* and *vertue*, as is juſt ſufficient to the rendering us *not vicious*. And then *ſecondly*, Whether, if we do thus endeavour, we can eaſily be at a loſs in diſtinguiſhing between *good* and *evil*, *duty* and *ſin*, in any inſtance; And conſequently, Whether we can be much in danger of ill *uſing* our *liberty*, and ſo tranſgreſſing upon that account.

I have been longer upon this firſt head than I intended, but I ſhall make amends for it, by diſpatching the two following, in ſo much the fewer words. And indeed after ſo large an account as I have given of the general Rule, there is leſs need of dwelling upon particular ones.

II. In the *ſecond* place, In order to the *right uſe of our liberty*, and ſo ſecuring our ſelves from falling into ſin, through miſtaking the meaſures of *good* and *evil*; This will be a good rule to propoſe to our ſelves, namely, *That in matters of* Duty, *we ſhould rather do too much than too little*: *But in matters of* Indifferency, *we ſhould rather take too little of our liberty than too much.*

First, As to matters of *Duty* my meaning is this: That where the Laws of God have generally and indefinitely commanded a thing, but have not set down rules about the particular measures and proportions of it; in that case it is advisable rather to do more than we are perhaps precisely bound to do, that so we may be sure we have performed our duty; than by being scanty in our obedience, to run the hazard of falling short of our duty.

Thus for instance, Our Lord in the New Testament, hath often and solemnly commanded us to *pray*. But neither he nor his Apostles, have any where told us how *often* we are to *pray*; only they have bid us pray frequently. In this Case now a Man that makes a Conscience of performing his duty, will take all occasions and opportunities of lifting up holy hands, and devout affections to his heavenly Father: However, he will not fail, at least *once* every time he riseth, and *once* every time he goes to rest, to offer up a *solemn* Sacrifice of *Prayer* and *Praise*. Less than this, I say, he must not do, for fear he break the Commandment of praying *frequently*, praying *continually*. But more than this it will become him to do, in order to the giving himself satisfaction,

risfaction, that he hath fully performed it.

Thus again, *To give alms to the poor*, is an indiſpenſable Duty of our Religion. But what proportion of our ſubſtance we are to give away in *Alms* and Charity, is no where ſet down; but is wholly left to our *diſcretion*. Now in this caſe, it is certainly much more adviſable to give *liberally*, and *largely*, and *plentifully*; even as much as our condition in this World, and the neceſſities of our Families can allow: though by ſo doing, we ſhould prove to have given in greater abundance than we were ſtrictly obliged to: Than by giving *ſtingily* and *pinchingly*, now and then a little *pocket money* or ſo, to run the hazard of being Tranſgreſſors of the Commandment, and having our Portion among the *covetous* and *unmerciful*.

There is no *damage* comes to a Man by doing the former; but on the contrary, a great deal of *good*. For God never fails *bounteouſly* to reward the *bountiful* hand. But there is both *damage* and infinite *danger* in the latter. And thus we are to practiſe in all other Duties.

Only this caution we muſt take along with us: That we are always ſo to proportion the meaſures of every ſingle duty, as to render it

consistent with the performance of the other duties of our lives.

As for instance, we must not spend so much time in *Prayer*, as to hinder the pursuit of our *Callings*, and necessary business. We must so *give Alms*, as yet to leave our selves enough to pay every one their own, and to make a competent provision for our Families. But let us but take care to secure this, and then we cannot easily exceed in the measures of any duty. The more we *pray*, and the more we *give alms*, still the better. And so in all other instances of duty.

But now in the *second* place, the quite contrary to this are we to practise in matters of *liberty*. There the rule is, rather to take *less* than is allowed us, than to take *all*. Rather to abridge our selves of our lawful *liberties*, than by doing all that we may lawfully do, indanger our falling into sin.

There is no harm at all in departing from our Rights and Priviledges which God hath indulged us: But there is a great harm in extending them beyond their bounds. There is no evil in not gratifying our desires and appetites in all the things they crave, which are allowable, and which we are permitted to gratify

tify them in: But there is an infinite evil in gratifying them in unlawful forbidden inſtances. And therefore every wiſe and good Man will be ſure to keep on the ſafe ſide; and to prevent the danger of doing more than he ſhould do, he will not always do all that he may do.

The truth is, that Man that makes no ſcruple of *uſing* his *liberty* to the utmoſt ſtretch and extent of it upon all occaſions, and regards nothing more in his actions, than juſt that he do not fall into ſome direct ſin: That Man cannot always be innocent, but will be drawn into a hundred irregularities and miſcarriages.

Thus for Example, he that uſeth himſelf to *eat* or to *drink* to the utmoſt pitch that can be ſaid to be within the limits of *Temperance*, it is impoſſible but ſuch a one will now and then be unavoidably overtaken in the ſin of *Gluttony* or *Drunkenneſs*.

He that will uſe all the *liberties* that the Law allows him, for the making *advantages* to himſelf in his *Trade*, or his dealings with other Men: Such a one will not be able to avoid the juſt imputation of being in many inſtances an *Oppreſſor*, or a *hard Conſcienced* Man.

The

The safest way therefore if we mean to preserve our Vertue amidst the multitude of snares and Temptations that we meet with in the World, is to set bounds even to our *lawful liberties*; to keep our actions within such a compass, as not to come even near the *Confines* of *Vice* and *Sin*.

Though it is but a *point*, and that often an undiscernable one, that distinguisheth between what is *lawful*, and what is *unlawful*. Yet there is a great *latitude* in what is *lawful*. That is, if I gratify my Appetites but a little, I do that which is *lawful*; and if I gratify them more, I may do that which is *lawful* likewise. But he shews the most honest and vertuous Mind, that in his actions takes but a little of this *Latitude*, and by that means keeps himself at a good distance from that which is *vitious* and *criminal*.

III. But *thirdly* and lastly, To what degree soever we may think fit to make use of our liberty; yet at all times, *Assoon as we begin to doubt or fear we have gone as far as we lawfully can go; it is then high time to break off, and to proceed no further.* This is the last Rule I have to offer upon this occasion. And thus also, wherever we have a just ground of *suspicion* or *doubt*, whether

whether a thing be *lawful* or no; this *doubt* or *ſuſpicion*, is of it ſelf reaſon enough to make us forbear that thing. Unleſs indeed there be a *Neceſſity*, or a great *Charity* to be ſerved by the doing of it, which may in reaſon over-balance the *ſuſpicion* of its lawfulneſs.

Thus in matters of *Recreation*. If we have the leaſt doubt, whether this or the other *Pleaſure* or *Divertiſement* be *innocent* and *lawful*; why, that is Argument enough, without more ado, to make us *forbear* it; though perhaps we ſee others uſe it without ſcruple.

Thus in matters of *Temperance*, when we firſt begin to ſuſpect that we have *drunk* as much as is convenient for us: Let us by all means leave off, and break from the Company.

Thus in matters of *Sobriety*, when we have reaſon to doubt, that we are come up to the full bounds of the Chriſtian *gravity* and *modeſty*; and that any degree more of *pomp* or *bravery* in our *garb*, or in our *attendance*, or in our *Equipage*, will reliſh of Pride, or Vanity, or Affectation: It is high time rather to abate ſomething of our *ſumptuouſneſs* in theſe things, than to proceed any further.

And thus laſtly in matters of *Equity* and *Juſtice*, when we firſt begin to have a *ſuſpicion*, that ſuch

ſuch a practice is an *indirect* or *knaviſh* trick, or that we are too *ſevere* and *hard* upon a Man, upon whom we have got an advantage: Why this *ſuſpicion* alone is enough in reaſon to check us in our cariere, and to put us upon more fair and moderate courſes.

This is a Rule that will for ever be fit for us to practiſe, for it is grounded upon Eternal Reaſon. Indeed it is as old as *Morality*. *Quod dubitas ne feceris*. Do nothing that you doubt of, is a Maxim that obtain'd among the Heathens as well as among us Chriſtians.

I dare not indeed ſay, that this Rule holds univerſally, in all Caſes. For Caſes do ſometimes happen, wherein it will be adviſable for a Man to act even againſt his doubts. But in ſuch matters as I am now ſpeaking of, matters wherein a Man is at perfect liberty to act or not to act: In all ſuch Caſes, it will always, without exception, be a true, and a ſafe, and a wiſe Rule. And I am ſure, if Men would ſeriouſly charge themſelves with the practice of it, they would hereby prevent a multitude of Sins and Tranſgreſſions, with which they uſually *inflame* their *Accounts* againſt the Day of Judgment.

And

And thus much of the *Rules* I had to propose, as to the *use of our Liberty*, in such cases where a Man is at a loss in finding out the measures and bounds of *duty* and *sin*, and upon that account is in danger of Transgressing. I have only *two* things more to add upon this Argument, by way of *Application*, and I have done. The one as a *Caution* to prevent the misapplying these Rules; the other as an *encouragement* to put them in practice.

That which I have to say by way of *caution* is this: That what I have been now recommending, especially under the two last heads, is not intended to be a rule or direction to any *Hypochondriack*, or Melancholy Persons, or such as are apt to be *over-scrupulous* about their actions: For indeed to such persons it is the worst advice that can be given.

For they are apt to doubt and boggle at every thing, be it never so innocent and free from blame. They dare not eat a hearty meal for fear of being *Intemperate*. And for fear of not being *devout* enough, they exhaust their Spirits, and spoil their health, through the continual *intention* of their minds to serious things.

Now Persons that are of this temper, are rather to be encouraged to take more *liberties*

than they do; than to abate any that they make use of.

But their case is of another consideration, and foreign to my present purpose; and therefore I here say no more about it. It being sufficient to have given this intimation to such people, that they do not make an ill use of any thing that I have now represented; for assuredly, what hath been now said, doth not much concern them.

2. The other thing I have to say, and that by way of *Encouragement*, is this: I doubt not but some will be apt to think, that the Rules I have now given about the *exercise of our liberty*, are much too strict and severe; and that if they must be tied up to such measures, then farewel all the *joy* and *pleasure*, and *comfort* of their lives. But to such People I would crave leave to say, that they have very wrong notions of this matter.

The using of their *liberty* in such a manner as I have been recommending, would not rob them of one true *pleasure* or *comfort* that this World affords. So far from that, that I am very sure, whoever frames his life according to these measures, shall live a hundred times a happier Life, and shall enjoy the World and all

all the *pleaſures* and *advantages* of it, much more to his own content and ſatisfaction; than if he put no check to the craving of his Appetites, but always indulged and gratified them in every thing, and as much as they deſired.

Aſſure your ſelves, Vertue and Religion will never hinder you from enjoying any pleaſure or ſatisfaction that is natural. On the contrary there is great reaſon to believe, that the practice thereof will extreamly heighten and advance the ſatisfactions you can receive from your Worldly Enjoyments. I doubt not in the leaſt, but to a ſincerely pious and vertuous Man, and that hath a regard to God in all his actions, even the very pleaſures and comfotts of this Life are more gratifying and affecting, than to any ſenſual or wicked Man. For ſuch a one, as he is more capable of enjoying them, ſo do they come to him likewiſe without the mixtures of thoſe uneaſy, troubleſome, bitter reflections, that other Men feel in the very beſt of their Enjoyments.

Let no Man therefore apprehend any loſs of his pleaſures by entirely devoting himſelf to God's Service, and *uſing his liberty* in that careful way I have been recommending. Let him not think that he ſhall hereby be too much

ſtraitned and *confined*. For certainly this is the true means, not only to keep him for ever from being a Slave to any thing, but alſo mightily to improve and encreaſe his *liberty*.

For by thus exerciſing himſelf, all the powers of his Soul will be vaſtly inlarged, and he will hereby attain both *leiſure* and *will* to employ all his rational Faculties about the beſt and the nobleſt objects in the World, which will yield him the greateſt pleaſure that is to be had on this ſide Heaven. Whereas if he had given up himſelf to be govern'd by any of his ſenſual Appetites, he had been a *poor narrow confined* Creature indeed; not capable of any greater ſatisfactions or pleaſures, than what the Brutes do enjoy as well as himſelf, but with leſs uneaſineſs, and fewer diſturbances.

It is true indeed, a ſenſual Man hath no notion of this kind of pleaſures, no more than a *Beaſt* hath of the pleaſures of a *Man*. And therefore it is no wonder that ſuch Men entertain all talk about them as little better than meer *Cant* and *Jargon*. But I ſeriouſly appeal to all Men that have ever made any trials in the way of Religion and Vertue, whether the Contentments and ſatisfactions they have received

ceived from the rational uſe of their *liberty*, and the thoughts and reflections that hereby they do approve themſelves to God, and live in hopes of his Favour, and have a fair proſpect of a glorious Immortal State in another World: I ſay, whether they do not find the pleaſures and contentments that ariſe from hence, to be infinitely more ſolid, and ſubſtantial, and durable, than any of thoſe that they receive from the gratification of their ſenſual Appetites in a vitious unreaſonable manner.

Oh therefore, Let none of us make any ſcruple of devoting our ſelves entirely, and without reſerve, to God Almighty's Service. Let none of us be afraid to put reaſonable reſtraints upon our Paſſions and Appetites. Aſſuredly the thus *uſing our liberty*, is the certain way to preſerve and encreaſe it, and with it, the pleaſure and comfort of our Lives; and not only ſo, but to render us Everlaſtingly Happy and Bleſſed in the other World. Which that we may all be, *God of his infinite mercy grant*, &c.

FINIS.

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